

NORTH KINGSTON CHOIR COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

17th August 2021

Attendees: Penny Hamilton (PH), Chair; Sue Manson (SM), Treasurer; Georgi Vaughn (GV), Secretary; Sally Winter (SW), Membership; Shira Keshet (SK), Communications; Jessica Bate (JB), Musical Director (partial attendance).

Apologies: Nello Bearzatto (NB), Events; Vanessa Hartley (VH), Social.

1. Finances – SM

SM had no changes to report since the previous meeting.

The Committee discussed whether to offer members a rebate on fees for the autumn term because of the cancelled rehearsals in the summer term. The Committee noted that four out of the planned six sessions had gone ahead. The Committee also noted that the choir's fees are quite cheap anyway and the Committee did not feel that members would expect a rebate. The Committee decided not to offer a rebate on autumn term fees, although the Committee will consider the matter further if raised by members.

SM noted that the choir's standard fee is £50 a term and recommended that the fee for the autumn term stay at this amount. The Committee agreed that, due to the current circumstances, any member who does not currently feel able to return to rehearsals in the autumn term for health reasons should be allowed to take a sabbatical for the term without being required to pay a fee to keep their place. SM noted that although this may reduce the choir's income, the choir's reserves would be sufficient to cover any budget shortfall.

Action points:

- **PH to inform members of sabbatical policy.**
- **PH to request members to pay fees of £50 ahead of term starting.**

2. Autumn term plan – PH

PH thanked GV for circulating Making Music's updated risk assessment guidance. PH noted that the main areas to consider when planning mitigations are: aerosol spread, for which mitigations might include ventilation and face coverings; droplet spread, for which mitigations might include retaining some physical distancing; and surface spread, for which mitigations might include an enhanced cleaning regime and hand-washing.

The Committee reviewed the responses to the autumn term survey, conducted at the end of July. The Committee was encouraged to see that 82.6% of choir members were either "Comfortable" or "Quite comfortable" with the idea of returning to indoor rehearsals. The Committee noted that a high proportion of members (97.8%) had reported being vaccinated with either one or two doses, which should be reassuring for members who may feel nervous about rehearsing indoors.

PH noted that there were a small number of comments from members who would prefer to continue rehearsals outdoors. The Committee felt that this would not be practical for a number of reasons. By September there will not be sufficient light to rehearse outdoors from 8.00-9.30pm. The weather will also be unpredictable. PH reported that Fern Hill School would probably not be keen to allow the choir to continue rehearsing in the playground because they had a complaint about the noise from a neighbouring property after the last rehearsal. JB suggested that if we do get some warm weather in September, she could take the choir outdoors for part of rehearsals, e.g. for the warmup. The Committee agreed to leave this to JB's discretion.

PH noted that the main thing the Committee needed to discuss was therefore the mitigations that need to be put in place in order to ensure that: (i) no member who is knowingly infectious attends rehearsals; and (ii) if a member who is unknowingly infectious attends a rehearsal, they do not infect other members.

PH suggested that choir members should continue to fill out the pre-rehearsal survey each week, to ensure that members who have symptoms or who have been instructed to self-isolate do not attend rehearsals. The Committee agreed that members should continue to register in this way, but felt that the choir could rely on members to fill in the survey and therefore the Committee does not need to continue to check members in at the entrance. The Committee noted that SW could use the list generated from the survey as a register and if it is noted that any member is not filling out the survey, they can be given a firm reminder to do so.

GV noted that it is no longer a legal requirement for the choir to display the Test and Trace venue QR code for members to check in. The Committee decided that since many other venues no longer require checking in via QR codes and the choir will be keeping its own record of attendees, it is no longer necessary to display the QR code at rehearsals.

The Committee noted that good ventilation is important to prevent infection spread via aerosols. Fern Hill school hall is an ideal venue as it is large and has high ceilings. PH reported that the hall has high-level windows which can be opened to encourage airflow, as well as leaving the doors open. The hall also has an automatic fan. The Committee discussed whether it was worth getting a CO2 monitor for the hall but felt that it was unlikely to be a reliable indicator and might encourage a false sense of security. The Committee agreed that members should be asked to leave the hall during the break in order to allow ventilation of the room. The Committee noted that it would need to inform members that this would be expected in all weathers, so members should dress accordingly. Members should also expect to wrap up warm even indoors when the weather gets colder, as good ventilation will still be required.

The Committee discussed whether to require vaccine passes and/or regular lateral flow tests. The Committee noted that the majority of members (56.5%) were not in favour of vaccine passes. The Committee felt that choir members should be informed of the high level of vaccination among members in order to instil confidence, but that requiring vaccine passes would be an unnecessary level of bureaucracy in the circumstances. The Committee also noted the guidance from Making Music that imposing vaccine passes could raise data protection and discrimination issues.

The Committee noted that the majority of members (67%) were not in favour of requiring regular lateral flow testing. The Committee noted that when schools return in September and people start returning to offices, many members are likely to be taking regular tests. The Committee decided that members should be encouraged to take regular lateral flow tests but that this should not be enforced by the choir.

The Committee discussed whether it was necessary for members to be physically distanced in rehearsals. PH noted that in the survey 60.9% of members were in favour of either 1m or 2m distancing. The Committee noted that retaining some measure of distancing is important to mitigate the risk of infection spread by droplets. GV displayed possible layouts for the school hall, allowing for circulation space around the outside of the hall and at least 2m between JB and the front row. The Committee agreed that although it is rare for all 50 members to attend a rehearsal, it is necessary to ensure that there is space for all members, to avoid having to turn members away. The Committee decided that there is not space in the school hall for 2m distancing while allowing sufficient circulation space, but 1.5m distancing is possible and seems an appropriate compromise. The Committee noted that while singing at a distance from others can be a more challenging and less enjoyable experience, the Committee nevertheless feels that it is best to be cautious in this regard for the time being.

JB raised the fact that from a musical perspective, choir members will inevitably have lost some of their confidence and technique because of the long break from rehearsals, and that a lot of catchup work would need to be done in order to be ready for the Southwark Cathedral concert in December. JB noted that the choir would need to start work on its repertoire for the concert as soon as rehearsals begin. The Committee agreed that it should be emphasised to members that they need to be ready to work hard to prepare for the Southwark Cathedral concert, after the casual nature of the summer term rehearsals.

The Committee discussed whether a cleaning regime for school chairs needed to be put in place. SM noted that as people have been out and about more since the end of lockdown, members will be used to things like going to pubs and restaurants and travelling on public transport, so cleaning all the chairs before they are set out would seem excessive by comparison. The Committee agreed that the choir will provide disposable gloves and wet wipes so that any member who wants to can clean their chair before use. Wet wipes will also be available for members to wipe touchpoints when they use the toilets, if desired. The Committee noted that the school does not expect the choir to conduct any extra cleaning as they have their own cleaners. The Committee agreed that the choir will continue to provide hand sanitiser at the entrance for those who want to use it.

GV asked whether Fern Hill had updated their risk assessment with regard to private hire. PH to request an updated risk assessment, if any.

The Committee discussed whether face coverings should be worn during rehearsals. The Committee noted that only seven members (15.2%) were in favour of face coverings in the survey and there were several comments about the difficulty of singing in masks. The Committee therefore felt that it is not necessary to mandate face coverings but noted that, as is now the case in other venues, it is up to individual members if they choose to wear one or not. The Committee felt that since it will not mandate face coverings for singing, there would be little point in requiring them when moving around. The Committee agreed that members should be advised to respect others' space when moving around, especially during breaks.

The Committee agreed that the timing of rehearsals should return to the standard 8.00-9.30pm with a break halfway through, although the break may be a bit longer than usual to enable the hall to be vacated and ventilated.

The Committee noted that Tom Speight (TS) would be attending the rehearsal on 20th September 2021 in preparation for his album release show on 28th September 2021. JB noted that several local Kingston gigs had recently had to be rescheduled and TS's show is not guaranteed to go ahead. The Committee noted that the choir has bought 24 tickets to the show in order to perform. If the show does get

postponed, the Committee will consider at that time whether or not to go ahead on the rescheduled date.

PH reviewed Making Music's six priority actions for risk assessment and additional points to consider. The Committee had considered most of the points raised.

The Committee noted that it already has a plan for what happens if someone becomes ill during a rehearsal.

The Committee considered the impact of its plans on people with protected characteristics and the clinically vulnerable. The Committee noted that no member identified themselves as clinically vulnerable in the survey and 95.7% of members said that they were not clinically vulnerable.

The Committee discussed whether it needed to implement any measures to control traffic flow of members at rehearsals. The Committee felt that since the school hall is a large space and members tend to arrive gradually, it is not necessary to put any one-way system in place. However, members will be asked to start arriving gradually from 7.50pm rather than all at once at 8.00pm, as in the summer term. PH noted that the behaviours expected from members would be very similar to the previous term.

The Committee discussed the layout of the sections. JB felt that it would be best to try to return to the usual layout, with the men in between the alto and soprano sections, as it is difficult for JB to hear the men if they are at the back. GV noted that with 1.5m distancing there would be up to six rows of nine, so it should be possible to arrange the sections in this way. The Committee agreed that JB would need to see how it works in rehearsals and possibly rearrange.

GV raised the question of whether JB would need to use the headset microphone in order to be heard at the back of the hall. The Committee agreed that JB should see how it goes at the first rehearsal and have the mic available if needed.

PH wondered whether the Committee needs to ask for volunteers to help with setup. The Committee noted that the main job will be setting out the chairs, as well as ensuring appropriate PPE is available. PH will check with Alan Waterman as to whether he is happy to set up every week. SW volunteered to arrive early at rehearsals to help with setup. The Committee agreed that PH should ask for volunteers to be available in case more help is needed.

The Committee discussed term dates. The first rehearsal will be on Monday 6th September 2021. JB noted that she would be away on 18th October 2021. The Committee agreed that rather than cancel that week's rehearsal, it would try to arrange sectionals. The choir will then break for half-term. Rehearsals will then run from Monday 1st November 2021 until possibly 6th or 13th December 2021, to be confirmed. JB suggested the possibility of an extra rehearsal on Saturday 20th November 2021 in preparation for the Southwark Cathedral concert. PH to notify members to save the date.

JB left the meeting.

PH noted that the choir's risk assessment and guidance documents needed to be updated. GV volunteered to do this. The Committee noted that it would retain the previous iteration of the documents. SK will upload the new documents to the website when available and PH will email members to inform them of the rehearsal plan. NB will continue to be responsible for setting up the pre-rehearsal survey each week.

Action points:

- **PH to request updated risk assessment from Fern Hill, if any.**
- **GV to update risk assessment and other guidance documents.**
- **SK to upload new documents to website when available.**
- **NB to set up pre-rehearsal survey each week.**
- **PH to email members with autumn term dates and details of autumn term rehearsal plan.**

3. Membership – SW

SW reported that there are potentially six new members ready to join in September, four men and two women. The Committee agreed that all new members should be invited to join from the first rehearsal of term, since the choir will be starting to work on new repertoire. GV noted that SW will need to make sure that the new members are notified of the rehearsal plan and expected behaviours.

Action points:

- **SW to invite new members to come for a taster session at the first rehearsal of term.**
- **SW to send rehearsal plan and expected behaviours to new members when available.**

4. Events

SK asked how far in advance the choir would need to let Southwark Cathedral know if the choir is unable to go ahead with the December concert. SM noted that no deposit had yet been paid. The Committee agreed that NB should follow up with Southwark Cathedral and emphasise that the choir is looking forward to its performance there but seeking some clarity about their cancellation policy, given the uncertainty of the current situation.

The Committee agreed that NB should contact the V&A to register our interest in performing there at Christmas and find out if it will be a possibility.

PH noted that the choir would not be singing at Ellie Giffard's wedding in September.

Action points:

- **NB to contact Southwark Cathedral and check on cancellation policy.**
- **NB to contact V&A re possible Christmas performance.**

5. Communications – SK

SK noted that she would update the website once the autumn term rehearsal plan is finalised.

Action points:

- **SK to update website once autumn term plan is finalised.**

6. Social

The Committee discussed whether VH should plan a back-to-school social. The Committee felt that VH should consider options for a social in the first half of term, but not right at the start of term.

PH noted that VH is considering possibilities for a social after the Southwark Cathedral gig in December. The Committee noted that VH may want to consider whether to plan a separate Christmas social as well.

Action points:

- **VH to consider options for an autumn social, post-concert social in Southwark and possible Christmas social.**

7. AOB

There was no other business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Tuesday 12th October 2021 (hopefully at SM's house!)